

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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R 181817Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9847

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BRASIL

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 8507

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VE

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT PEREZ AND BOLIVIA'S ACCESS TO THE SEA

1. SUMMARY: THE DECISION OF PRESIDENT PEREZ TO INJECT HIMSELF INTO THE ISSUE OF BOLIVIA'S ACCESS TO THE SEA IS PUZZLING AT FIRST GLANCE. BUT THE MOVE WAS NOT ENTIRELY ILLOGICAL IN TERMS OF VENEZUELA'S FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES. LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY AS PROTECTION ON THE OIL PRICE ISSUE IS THE FIRST OF THESE. CARLOS ANDRES BELIEVES THAT VENEZUELAN INFLUENCE CAN AND MUST BE USED TO OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES TO UNITY. VENEZUELA'S DRIVE TO COOPT THE SMALLER AND POORER COUNTRIES OF THE REGION PLAYED A PART, AS DID VENEZUELAN SENTIMENTALITY ABOUT BOLIVIA AND BOLIVAR. THE PRESIDENT MAY NOT HAVE THOUGHT THAT HIS ENDORSEMENT OF BOLIVIA'S ASPIRATIONS WOULD BE SEEN IN CHILE AS A PROVOCATION--OR HE MAY HAVE CALCULATED THAT IT WOULD MAKE NO DIFFERENCE IN VIEW OF THE GOC'S LOW STANDING. DOMESTICALLY THE TRIP TO BOLIVIA PROBABLY

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DID NOT DO MUCH FOR THE PRESIDENT. END SUMMARY

2. AS SEEN FROM HERE THE PEREZ VISIT TO LA PAZ FOLLOWED THE FAMILIAR PATTERN ESTABLISHED IN HIS PREVIOUS EXCURSIONS: CONSIDERABLE BOLIVARIAN RHETORIC, A GOOD DEAL OF CAMPAIGN-STYLE MINGLING WITH THE CROWDS, PLEDGES TO CONTINENTAL SOLIDARITY AND OFFERS OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE--ALL ACCOMPANIED BY MASSIVE PUBLICITY AT HOME. BUT THIS TRIP WAS DIFFERENT IN ONE IMPORTANT ASPECT. WITH EVERY EVIDENCE OF DUE DELIBERATION AND EVEN ENTHUSIASM, THE PRESIDENT INJECTED HIMSELF INTO AN ANCIENT AND PASSIONATE QUARREL INVOLVING OTHER LATIN AMERICAN STATES. WHY? MORE THAN A FEW VENEZUELAN ARE ASKING WHAT HE WOULD HOPE TO GAIN BY MIXING IN THAT DISTANT AFFAIR.

3. FIRST, THERE IS LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY. PEREZ STATED THE PROPOSITION CLEARLY IN HIS AUG 8 PRESS CONFERENCE: "IF THESE PROBLEMS (HISTORIC LATIN AMERICAN DISPUTES) ARE NOT SOLVED, LATIN AMERICAN UNITY WILL REMAIN A MERE TERM--AND WE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE THE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF OUR COUNTRIES." THE PRESIDENT GENUINELY BELIEVES THAT THESE PROBLEMS CAN BE SOLVED WITH VENEZUELAN LEADERSHIP AND A COMMON DEDICATION TO UNITY. (THIS EVEN EXTENDS TO THE DIFERENDO WITH COLOMBIA WHERE PEREZ APPEARS MORE DISPOSED TO MAKE CONCESSIONS THAN MOST ANYONE ELSE IN VENEZUELA). THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION THAT ON LATIN AMERICAN UNITY HE IS A TRUE BELIEVER. HIS VISION IS BOLIVARIAN AND HE MEANS TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE DURING HIS TERM OF OFFICE.

4. LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY SERVES OTHER PURPOSES. IT IS A KEY ELEMENT IN THE VENEZUELAN STRATEGY FOR PROTECTING ITSELF ON THE OIL PRICE ISSUE. THAT STRATEGY INCLUDES UNREMITTING SUPPORT FOR THE NIEO AND THE THIRD-WORLD POSITION ON INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ISSUES GENERALLY. BUT THE GOV WANTS ALL THE HEMISPHERE COMPANY IT CAN GET. IF THERE IS LATIN AMERICAN UNITY, VENEZUELA CAN STAND UP TO THE US WITHOUT FEAR OF FINDING ITSELF A LONELY TARGET FOR THE AREA'S CONSUMERS. THE OVERRIDING OBJECTIVE OF GOV FOREIGN POLICY IS TO PREVENT ISOLATION ON THE PRICE ISSUE.

5. THE VENEZUELAN DRIVE FOR LEADERSHIP IS ANOTHER ELEMENT. THIS DRIVE HAS TENDED TO CONCENTRATE ON THE SMALLER, ECONOMICALLY WEAKER COUNTRIES OF THE CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE ANDEAN

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REGION. THE STRATEGY IS TO CREATE TIES AND INFLUENCE WITH COUNTRIES WHERE VENEZUELA'S WEALTH CAN HAVE ITS GREATEST IMPACT. THE OBJECTIVE IS TO BUILD A LOOSE COALITION OF SYMPATHETIC GOVTS PREPARED TO SUPPORT THE GOV'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONS. SOME THOUGHT OF A COUNTER-WEIGHT TO BRAZIL AND MEXICO IS ALSO PROBABLY PRESENT. CLOSE TIES WITH BOLIVIA WOULD FIT NEATLY INTO SUCH A DESIGN--AND SUCH TIES CAN ONLY BE FORGED THROUGH VENEZUELAN SUPPORT ON THE ONE ISSUE THAT REALLY MATTERS TO BOLIVIA.

6. SIMON BOLIVAR MUST ALSO BE COUNTED AS A FACTOR. VENEZUELA IS AS OBSESSED WITH THE LIBERATOR AS EVER, AND THIS PRESIDENT PERHAPS MORE SO THAN MOST OF HIS PREDECESSORS. BOLIVIA IS VERY SPECIAL IN THIS COUNTRY'S BOLIVARIAN SCHEME OF THINGS. IT BEARS THE GREAT MAN'S NAME AND IS THE SYMBOL OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH SUCRE; IT IS POOR, BACKWARD AND HISTORICALLY MISTREATED; IT DESERVES VENEZUELA'S SPECIAL SYMPATHY AND BROTHERHOOD. FURTHERMORE, IT IS SAFELY SOME DISTANCE AWAY. CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ IDENTIFIES WITH BOLIVAR AND NO DOUBT BELIEVES A MAGNANIMOUS GESTURE TOWARD BOLIVIA WOULD HAVE THE LIBERATOR'S BLESSING.

7. THE CHILEAN ANGLE IS THE MOST DIFFICULT TO CALCULATE. IN PRIVATE THE FOREIGN MIN AT LEAST TALKS ABOUT EXERTING A FRIENDLY AND MODERATING VENEZUELAN INFLUENCE ON THE GOC. ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF ALLENDE-ERA REFUGEES ARE COMFORTABLY POSITIONED ON THE PUBLIC PAYROLL HERE (E.G. CARLOS JORQUERA IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND ANICETO RODRIGUEZ ON THE STAFF OF THE SENATE), THERE HAVE BEEN NO SIGNS OF OFFICIAL ENCOURAGEMENT OF THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. THEY GET ALMOST NO PRESS AND CERTAINLY NO RECENT WORDS OF SOLIDARITY FROM THE GOV OR AD. (OUR GUESS IS THAT THE MEETING AT COLONIA TOVAR OF LEIGHTON, MIRANDA, ET AL., WAS THE WORK OF GABRIEL VALDES, WITH NO MORE THAN ACQUIESCENCE FROM THE GOV.) IT THUS SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE PRESIDENT SET OUT TO EMBROIL HIMSELF IN A CONTROVERSY WITH THE GOC. BUT HE MAY HAVE CALCULATED THAT ANY RISK IN THAT DIRECTION WAS INCONSEQUENTIAL GIVEN THE JUNTA'S FEEBLE INTERNATIONAL POSITION.

8. DOMESTICALLY, THE IMAGE OF A VIGOROUS LEADER ABROAD ASSERTING LATIN AMERICAN "INDEPENDENCE" AND SOLIDARITY HAS APPEAL. BUT POPULAR ENTHUSIASM HERE FOR THESE EXPEDITIONS HAS WANED, AND THE VISIT TO BOLIVIA HAS GENERATED CRITICISM ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE PRESIDENT IS TRAVELING TOO MUCH AND GIVING AWAY TOO MUCH MONEY. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE WARM ASSOCIATION WITH BANZER PRODUCED MORE POINTED AND PUBLIC CRITICISM. THE DAYS OF THE BETANCOURT DOCTRINE ARE OVER BUT VARIOUS COPEI SPOKESMEN HAVE CHARGED THAT EMBRACING THIS "DICTATOR" WAS NO SERVICE TO LATIN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY. (THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A TINGE OF THE DOUBLE STANDARD IN THE INTERPRETATION THAT POLITICAL CAMP GIVES TO THE PRINCIPLE OF "IDEOLOGICAL PLURALISM.") IN SUM, WE DOUBT THAT THE TRIP DID PEREZ ANY GREAT GOOD HERE AT HOME. SHLAUDEMAM

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